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FM AMEMBASSY BAKU

TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0196

INFO RUCNCIS/CIS COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES PRIORITY

RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA PRIORITY 3090

RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY

RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC PRIORITY

RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY

RUEHVEN/USMISSION USOSCE PRIORITY 1153

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 BAKU 000986

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [KDEM](#) [PHUM](#) [AJ](#)

SUBJECT: AZERBAIJAN: PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION SITREP#3 21:00

BAKU

REF: A. BAKU 981

[1](#)B. BAKU 985

[1](#)1. (SBU) After a largely uneventful day of voting across Azerbaijan, polls closed at 19:00 local time. Vote counting was initiated immediately thereafter. Early indications are that the tabulation process is being rushed, perhaps as a result of pressure from the Central Election Commission or other entities in Baku that have pressed for quick reporting to district commissions. The count is currently taking place at 5,000 polling stations across the country, with about 1,000 - 1,400 registered voters per precinct. Polling stations, upon finishing the vote count and completing the voting protocol, must report results to district election commissions, which number 125 across the nation. District election commissions, in turn, will report results to the Central Election Commission in Baku.

[1](#)2. (SBU) Preliminary information from the Central Election Commission, as well as input from the Embassy's monitoring teams in the field, shows that voter turnout is averaging about 65-75%, or much higher than many pre-election observers predicted. President Ilham Aliyev appears to be receiving a large majority of votes, perhaps within the 80-90% range. Pro-GOAJ media are reporting a heavy turnout, based on input given to the Central Election Commission, and noting that exit polls, conducted by government-friendly NGOs, corresponded with their findings. Moscow's ITAR-TASS reported at 15:24 GMT, or 19:24 Baku time, that exit polls show that Ilham Aliyev is winning the vote with 82.6%.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Of 19 Embassy monitoring teams, two have reported substantial violations or irregularities. In Sumgayit, Embassy observers at two polling stations witnessed precinct workers removing ballot boxes and voting lists from the premises, and exiting through a back door. International and domestic observers were not allowed to follow. Domestic observers at these sites complained of repeated ballot stuffing all day. Embassy observers witnessed similar antics in Lankaran. At that polling station, precinct workers claimed to have counted the ballots in public within six minutes, then retreated behind a closed door, accompanied by a ruling party official and a number of unknown persons. Upon emerging, they suggested that the vast majority of votes were cast for President Aliyev.

[1](#)4. (SBU) In Baku, Embassy officers contacted the Central Election Commission and Presidential Apparatus to voice concern over these actions. Embassy observers in Sumgayit called the Embassy shortly thereafter to note that precinct officials there had received a highly critical telephone call from Baku, and were then verbally harassed by precinct election officials. Presidential Apparatus Legal Advisor Shahin Aliyev

then called Embassy officials in Baku to state that the vote at the two precincts in Sumgayit had been annulled. GOAJ officials continue to investigate problems in Lankaran. Meanwhile, U.K. Embassy observers reported irregularities in vote tabulations at polling stations in Ganja and Sheki, but later said that the infractions were not major. U.S. Embassy monitors in these cities -- observing at different polling stations -- have not reported significant problems.

15. (SBU) In three other polling stations, Embassy officials reported signs of ballot stuffing, including stacks of ballots stuck together inside the ballot box and suspicious signatures on voter lists, but did not see actually any extra ballots being put into boxes. In Tovuz, in Northwestern Azerbaijan, Embassy observers witnessed repeat voters. Before the count, a precinct captain fielded a call that appeared to criticize him for a low election day turnout. During the count, 20% of ballots, some of which were blank, were deemed invalid, without group consensus. At the same time, other embassy teams reported orderly vote counts, without incident. Precinct captains offered observers copies of protocols, which were accepted and brought to the Embassy. One U.K. Embassy observer offered significant praise for the conduct of the election in Baku.

16. (SBU) NDI representatives told Embassy officials that they had had a cordial meeting with officials of the Presidential Apparat this evening. Government officials wanted to hear their concerns or criticisms of the elections firsthand, and gather their general impression of the day's events. Apparat advisors then repeated their concerns about the Election

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Monitoring Center (EMC), which is conducting a nationwide parallel vote tabulation. EMC is not registered as a legal entity in Azerbaijan. Government officials continued to suggest that EMC cannot operate or conduct business as an organization. Rather, its members, as citizens of Azerbaijan, could conduct the PVT and report on results.

17. (SBU) Opposition parties in Azerbaijan have been rather quiet, thus far not issuing any major election day announcements. Earlier this week, the Musavat Party and other groups that did not participate in the election called for a public demonstration on Saturday, October 18. A venue has not been announced, though organizers suggested that the rally would take place in central Baku. It is unclear whether these groups would be able to attract a sizeable crowd to the streets.

17. (SBU) Two American citizens appeared on Azerbaijan's Lider TV this evening, announcing that they had observed voting over the course of the day and had found no significant shortcomings in the conduct of the election. The man and woman were identified as employees of USAID. Embassy notes, however, that the two are not affiliated with the Embassy or USAID in Azerbaijan. The problem may have been related to interpretation. Thirty American citizens, calling themselves the "American Observation Group, have come to Azerbaijan to monitor the elections. This group is not affiliated with the U.S. Government.  
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